



The Clamorings
of the People:
A Budget-Building
Fairy Tale



Once upon a time in the glorious Pacific Northwest, the People of the state of Washington established the biennial budget cycle.

Founded in the Constitution, and beginning on July One in each of the odd numbered years, the biennium ensures that roads will be built and schools will have teachers and the other clamoring of the People will be satisfied.





The biennial budget cycle allows that members of the House of Representatives, who serve for the length of one biennia, shall have accomplishments to hold up for examination by the People when they face election in November of each even numbered year. And because it benefits most in this way, the House is required to produce the budget of first consideration.





Knowing that a budget is weighty matter, not easily constructed, the People provided to the Legislature the luxurious 105-day or “long” legislative session to begin in January of each odd numbered year, although to slay the crafty dragons of budget building, the legislators will sometimes unplug the chamber clock at five minutes until midnight on the 105th day and fight on until their work is complete.

The People also provided to the Legislature the input of the Governor, who is required to submit a draft budget before the Legislature convenes and typically does so before retiring for Christmas vacation.





The Governor is the head of the executive branch and therefore, is ultimately responsible for implementing the mandates of the Legislature, collecting all of the taxes, and accounting for the expenditure of public monies. He is best situated to say where each dollar was spent in the previous biennium and knows intimately where accounts felt pinched or were flush. So with the help of his Office of Financial Management and top executive agency managers, known collectively as The Cabinet, the Governor builds a biennial budget in the fall of each even numbered year so that it might be waiting for the Legislators when they arrive for Long Session on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of the month of January in the odd numbered years.





The Office of Financial Management sets to work drafting a budget in September of the even numbered years, in a process that feels like slog, or perhaps like fog, but is currently known as POG.

During the spring of the even numbered years, in the time known as The Interim, each agency in the executive branch (where all the mandates of the Legislature are brought to life) answers the call of the Governor it serves, and offers delightful stories of its form and function and performance measures and Priorities of Government.





The beautiful princesses of the cabinet become harried during this season. And the princes of the cabinet are far from charming. Overworked, snappish and ragtag, they are weary and wan. Lesser bureaucrats are free to come and go, enjoying the delights of the season. And Legislators live their civilian lives, perhaps doorbelling for the coming primary elections. But no such luck for The Cabinet.

For each branch, there is a season of toil and a season of repose, a season of frenzy and a season of quietude, a season in the spotlight and a season in the wings. But for the People, who are the masters of all the branches, there is but diligence.





The second year of the biennium is a busy one for the People. Aspirants are running for every seat in the House of Representatives and half of the seats in the Senate.

If it happens to be a Leap Year as well, there are races for Governor, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction and all the statewide offices (though only a portion of Supreme Court seats, for these terms are staggered). Like the Presidency of this great nation, these offices are contested every fourth year, in those years divisible by the number four.





The People must come to know all these candidates, to approach them at forums and Town Halls and in the corners of the local grocery store to ask, “What do you stand for?” “What will you do?” “How might I count on you to support my cares?”

And once the primary election has occurred in September of the even numbered year, and the candidates number three—Democrat, Republican and Libertarian—the People redouble their efforts to ask, “What do you stand for?” “What will you do?” “How might I count on you to support my cares?”





And once the People have cast their votes, and the General Election in the even numbered year has been complete, the People must seek out their new office holders and say, “Thank you taking on this awesome task.

”We have given you the Long Legislative session to make a budget, and we have given you a reprieve in the even numbered years so that you will make only a supplemental budget to slay monsters and acknowledge buried treasures, and we have made the Governor to provide a draft budget, and we have empowered the leadership of the majority party to meet and frame a draft budget proposal, and we, The People, will give you more.





“We know so much about the tasks ahead, just ask us. We know what the People in this community care most about, just ask us. We know where in the budget to find the program that you love, just ask us. Facts, figures, data? Just ask us. Ask and ye shall receive.”





But it is not enough to gird new office holders with the strength of the People and the knowledge of the Community. For these brave souls will travel to the great city of Olympia, where the hubbub is mighty and the pressures ferocious. And so in the winter of the odd-numbered year, the second year of the biennium, the People watch.

They are vigilant.





When the Governor's budget (and if there happens to be a new governor taking office that January, the Transition Budget provided by the Governor-elect as well), and the House's budget of first consideration, and the House's minority party budget, and the Senate's budget begin to collide, snaking their ways through committees and floor votes and conference, the People call upon the Fairy Godmother of email, the Genie of the telephone, the angels of the in-person visit, for they are diligent. And when the Legislature adjourns on a day called Sine Die, the People are satisfied.

But their work is not complete.





For in each branch, there is a season of toil and a season of repose, a season of frenzy and a season of quietude, a season in the spotlight and a season in the wings. But for the People, who are the masters of all the branches, there is but diligence.

As the new biennium begins on July One in the odd numbered year, the People must implement their own strategic plan. And there, at the local level, gather all the learning and understanding.





And because knowledge is really the capacity for action and learning is the development of that capacity, the executive branch agencies review and consider the recommendations of the People in the autumn of the odd numbered years.

In the dark months of the winter of the even numbered years, while the People are reviewing data and making a strategic plan, the cabinet members garner support for new ideas, proposals, changes, which they take to the Legislature in the dark winter days of the Short Session.





Held in the even numbered years, the Short Session numbers 60 days. In this time of freedom, the Legislature does not build a new and comprehensive budget. It shores up shortfalls and allocates windfalls in a brief supplemental budget. And then, it turns its attention to matters of policy, the true matters of the People.

And the People are diligent.





As the spring blossoms forth in the even numbered years, in their season of toil their season of frenzy, their season in the spotlight, the top executive agency managers, known collectively as The Cabinet, send to the Governor the fortification that comes from the learning and recommendations of the People so that he might build a biennial budget in the fall, and that budget might be waiting for the Legislators when they arrive for Long Session on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of the month of January in the odd numbered years.





It is in this way, and this way only, that roads will be built and schools will have teachers and the other clamorings of the People be satisfied.



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